

THE

SEXORCIST

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THE SEXORCIST



SUDDENLY, CELIA KNIGHT WAS AWAKE. That noise. What is it? Where's it coming from?

She lay listening, warm in the snug bed, but now beginning to feel a chill in the back of her neck.

Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum.

A dull, regular sound. Not in the bedroom. Somehow, something very scary about it.

Listen, she said to herself severely, you're 17 years old, long past the time when noises in the night should panic you—if you're a practical, sensible 17-year-old girl, as you are.

But she was alone in the house, and it was deep, deep night.

Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum.

Was it coming from upstairs? Or down the hall?

Or was it only the sound of her own heart-beat, growing faster as the strange chill tickled and stung on her neck?

Gosh, she thought with enormous relief, that's all it is. Your own heart. Ha.

She turned over, snuggled deeper under the covers, and commanded herself: **Go to sleep.**

Celia was alone in the house because her mother was in New York on business, buying clothes for the new season. Usually Celia went with her, but this time it was impossible, or anyway inconvenient.

"But you won't be all alone, honey," Patricia Knight had said. "Mrs. Drummerstone will be staying with you, and that's like having a one-woman army in the house."

"But I don't need a one-woman army in the house," Celia had protested.

"I know," her beautiful mother (yep, still beautiful, at 41) had agreed. "I do. I mean I need to know there's someone with you while I'm away who throws the fear of God into all robbers and rapists and psychopaths and—"



Celia was alone in the house because her mother was in New York on business.



well, you know. And Mrs. Drummerstone certainly does **that**."

But a few hours ago, around eight o'clock, Mrs. Drummerstone had been called home by an emergency.

She had said she would be back soon.

She hadn't come back.

Kind of odd.

Or **had** she come back? Was she asleep in the guestroom? Right now?

Why worry, Celia told herself. Just go to sleep.

Then she sat up, clutching the bedclothes to her.

Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum-dum-dum.

It was not her heart. It was very, very definitely not her heart. It was in the house. It was coming from downstairs.

Again the strange chill on her neck.

She turned on the bedside light. One thirty-five, her little bedside clock said.

Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum-dum-dum.

Well, what was she going to do? Sit here in bed listening to it? Or get up and phone the police? **There's a noise downstairs somewhere and maybe you'd better come and check it out.**

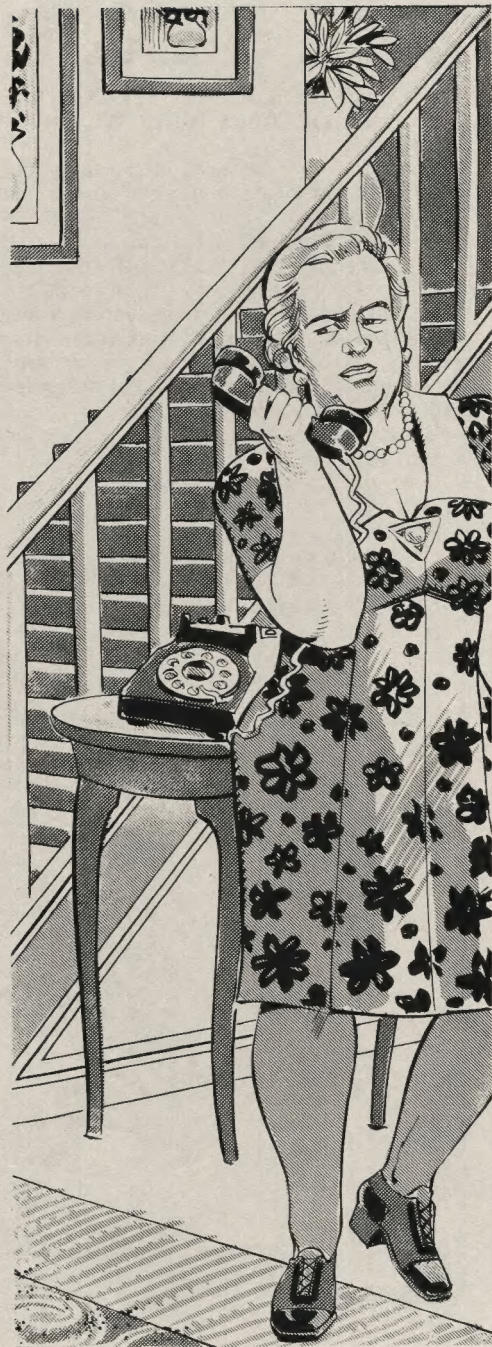
No. The first thing to do was go to the guestroom and wake up Mrs. Drummerstone, because of course Mrs. Drummerstone was there—had come in quietly while Celia was asleep. She had to be there. Mrs. Drummerstone never let anyone down. If she hadn't come back, she would have phoned.

Celia got out of bed. She slept in the nude most of the time, ever since she'd read a funny book about famous people who always went to bed that way, even when alone, and so she put on a robe.

She opened the bedroom door and looked down the hall. The dim nightlight at the end made the shadows enormous.

The sound was louder.

Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum-dum-dum-



Was it getting quicker, too?
And what was that smell? A harsh smell,
a burning smell.

Oh my God, was the house **on fire**?

Feeling panicky, and hating herself for it,
because she was not that kind of girl—

**(Just what kind of girl are you, Celia?
Have you ever really thought about it?
Deep, deep down?)**

—she ran down the hall to the guestroom,
opened the door, turned on the light—

And stood staring at the empty bed.

Mrs. Drummerstone had not come back.
Mrs. Drummerstone had failed to keep a
promise for the first time in her life.

Cool it, Celia, cool it, cool it, baby. There's
no one downstairs, it's a loose shutter, nat-
urally, it always **is** a loose shutter, banging
in the night wind, right?—in movies and
books? And the house isn't on fire, because
you'd feel hot, wouldn't you, if the house were
on fire, and you don't feel hot and sweaty,
you feel cold.

But phone the police anyway, huh? Yeah.
Might as well.

There was an extension phone in the guest-
room.

Except, suddenly, there wasn't. The ex-
tension phone in the guestroom had disap-
peared.

Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum-dum-dum.

Celia ran out of the room and down the hall
to her mother's bedroom. She turned on the
light. There was another extension phone on
the bedside table. Or had it mysteriously
vanished, too, like the one in the guestroom?

No. The pretty pink-and-ivory phone was
still there.

She hurried to the bedside table, picked
up the receiver.

What's the police number?

She didn't know. She'd never had occasion
to phone the police.



But something was wrong.
There was no familiar buzzing sound. No dial tone.

No point in looking up the police number in the phone book.

The telephone in the guestroom had disappeared and the telephone in her mother's room wasn't working.

Still again the dull muffled sound from somewhere below:

**Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum.
Da-dum-dum-dum-dum.**

But it didn't make sense. A burglar wouldn't make the sound, a crazy man, a psychopath, a rapist, a killer—no one would make such a sound, to call attention to himself! There had to be a reasonable explanation!



Oh yes? And what reasonable explanation could there be for the mystery of the two phones?

She ought to get out of the house.

Get out. Get out. Get out.

Open the window, climb out.

Wearing only her robe and bedroom slippers?

No. She would go back to her room, put on some warm clothes, then leave.

Celia started back down the hall when, with a great sweet swelling rush of relief, she thought of the reasonable explanation.

Her mother's phone was out of order and the phone company had taken the guestroom phone to change it for a later model.

As for the **da-dum, da-dum, da-dum** sound, it was simply the furnace in the basement, which had been acting very crankily lately.

She would go down to the basement right now and prove it. Prove that there was a reasonable explanation for everything and that she was a practical, sensible girl.

Celia and her mother, Pat Knight, lived in an old-fashioned two-story house halfway



up the hill on Oak Drive. Pat Knight owned the Seventh Avenue Dress Shop on Main Street. Her husband, Celia's father, Rod Knight, had walked out of the house one day ten years ago and never come back. Celia could still see the shadow of sadness in her mother's eyes and thought that she—sweet, beautiful Pat—was still in love. Celia herself just didn't care. She had been only seven when her good-looking father had taken off, and he never had been much in evidence around the house anyway.

There was an overgrown vacant lot on one side and an empty house with a FOR SALE sign in front on the other.

It took only a few minutes to drive down the hill to Main Street and the shopping section of town but at least half an hour to walk.

Of course at this time of night the town was dead, except for the police station.

But who needed the police? You didn't call the police to fix a cranky furnace, did you?

The drumming sound was louder as Celia walked down the stairs to the ground floor, turned on a wall light and opened the door to the basement.

The acrid smell struck her again, and a wave of coldness.

Why cold? When the furnace was on?

The furnace had to be on, to be making the **da-dum, da-dum** sound.

Sure the furnace was on, but it wasn't turning out any heat. It was just making the drumming sound.

It should be turned off. Maybe it had done some damage already. Something must be burning down there.

So she should phone the fire department.

Celia hurried to the downstairs phone, picked up the receiver.

Nothing. Dead.

So now what? Leave the house, run down the hill to the police station to get the fire



department?

No. More sensible to wake up a neighbor and use their phone.

But maybe in that time the fire in the basement would have spread out of control.

Whereas if she went down there right now she could probably put it out with the two buckets of water that were always kept near the furnace.

That was what a practical girl would do.

Celia went back to the basement door, turned on the basement light, slowly descended the narrow stairs as the sound grew and grew and grew.

Da-dum, da-dum, da-dum—DA-DUM, DA-DUM, DA-DUMMMM.

And then stopped.

The sudden overwhelming silence assaulted her senses like a blow. She drew in her breath sharply. She could hear the gasp her indrawn breath made. The horrible acrid smell stung her nose.

Get out of here, Celia! Get out, get out—now, now!

Celia turned, started to go back, hesitated.

An oddly seductive voice whispered:

"No, Little Sister, don't leave—now that you've finally arrived."

At this moment, in her hotel room in New York, Pat Knight thought:

Something is wrong at home.

But what could be wrong, with Mrs. Drummerstone there? Mrs. Drummerstone was a one-woman army, strong, healthy, and intelligent, and tireless, and kind, and—well, you just couldn't say enough for Mrs. Drummerstone. She was the leader in every good cause. Any emergency, any disaster, Ruth Drummerstone was right there.

If anything was wrong at home, Mrs. Drummerstone would have phoned Pat.

She hadn't. So nothing could be wrong.

Still —

Pat reached for the phone.

No. Ridiculous. She'd only be waking them up for nothing. Celia and Mrs. Drummerstone would have been asleep for hours. They would not exactly welcome a call from Pat because of a stupid feeling that had already passed — hadn't it?

Pat took her hand from the phone, turned over in bed. She needed a good night's sleep. Tomorrow was going to be a long exhausting day.

She would phone Celia first thing in the morning.

A winding stream ran down the hill just behind Mrs. Drummerstone's house on Myrtle Lane. Her children and the neighboring kids played there in the summers. One pool was deep enough to swim in.

Something lay in the pool now. It drifted idly back and forth in the slow current.

Now it bumped against a rock. Very, very

slowly, as the current pulled, it turned over.

The dappled moonlight, falling through the trees, showed a white face and wide-open eyes—Mrs. Drummerstone's face, frozen by death in an expression of mad terror.

"Don't leave, Little Sister," the oddly seductive voice whispered again.

Where did the voice come from?

"You can't see me, Little Sister," it whispered, as though it could read the question in Celia's mind, "but I am here, all the same."

What was this, a nightmare? Would she wake up in a few minutes and find herself in bed?—and Mrs. Drummerstone down the hall in the guestroom, and everything normal and safe and sensible, the way life should be?

"No, Little Sister, this is not a dream. And life is not always normal and safe and sensible. You know that too, Little Sister, although you try to hide it from yourself."



At this moment, in her hotel room in New York, Pat Knight thought:

Something is wrong at home.

Something lay in the pool now.



Why didn't she hurry back up the stairs, and lock the basement door, and run out of the house?

"Because you don't want to, Little Sister. You want to stay here. You are curious, Little Sister. You want to know more. You want to know who I am, and what is happening, and why."

Yes, that was true. Celia knew it was true.

"Let us see a little more of you, Little Sister."

Celia's hands moved. She did not consciously will them to move, yet they moved.

Her hands opened her robe and pulled it back, exposing her whole body.

Exposing her whole body to **what?** Who was there to see her naked body?

No one. No one was in the basement.

And yet **it** was there. It was whispering again.

"So sweet, Little Sister. So rich and full. Truly thou art beautiful, Little Sister, wait-

ing to be sipped and drunk like a goblet of rosy wine. And who will be the first to sip from this delicious goblet? I? I think so. But first there must be a bargain, must there not, Little Sister? A bargain between you and me. I cannot expect to be given the use of your beautiful body without giving you something in return. Now, what shall it be?"

Celia waited. It was cold in the basement, yet her naked body was not cold.

And this was not a dream.

"No, Little Sister," the whispering voice agreed, "as I told you, it is not a dream. But last year, on a hot August night, with a full moon in the sky, you had a dream. You have tried to put it out of your mind, but it is still there, deep down in a secret place. Let us take it out of the secret place. Let your dream live again. Now."

The hot summer night dream lived again in Celia's mind.



Her hands opened her robe and pulled it back, exposing her whole body.



She was a cat.

Not a comfortable household cat. Not the kind of safe de-sexed household tabby cat little girls play with.

In the dream, her sex had changed. She was a tomcat.

Ah, what a cat! Look at the fine lithe body, strong and virile! Look at the lush black fur, and the claws! Such claws! Push them out from their sheath, pull them back, in and out, out and in! Claws like curved daggers, ivory scimitars! And the fangs in the black cat's mouth, like a panther's!

On this hot summer night, where is the black cat bound? There is nowhere he cannot go. He has the strength and the claws to climb anywhere he wishes.

This house.

This handsome Colonial-style house on Hallbrook Heights, the very best part of town.

The black cat wishes to go to the handsome white house on Hallbrook Heights.

Who lives there?

The Rennie family lives there.

Susan Rennie lives there.

(There always seems to be one girl in town who stands out.

(Susan Rennie stood out. She had everything. She was beautiful—and rich.

(She moved like a poem, like the spring wind through white beech trees. Her blonde, blonde hair was like a golden banner waving on her smooth shoulders. Her face, her loins, her breasts—how could any one girl be so altogether perfect?)

On this hot August night she lies asleep in her beautiful bedroom in the house on

Hallbrook Heights. Her full young breasts slowly rise and fall as she breathes, and her soft lips are curved in a smile. Perhaps she is dreaming of love.

One of the windows is open. The cur-

tains sway in the breeze.

Now the black cat is on the windowsill. Suddenly he seems enormous, like a tiger, a black tiger burning with desire in the hot night.

His green eyes center on the girl in the bed. His muscles are tense. He crouches and springs, and —

"But there the dream stopped, didn't it, Little Sister?"

For the first time, Celia was able to speak. "Yes," she whispered.

"What would you say, Little Sister, if we should **really** bring this dream to life? For we can do anything, you know. Anything—if you and I strike a bargain together."

"What kind of bargain?"

"Why," the voice whispered, "for you to become anything you wish to be, at certain times—in return for giving yourself to me."

"How can I give myself to you, when I can't see you?"

"You can't see me, Little Sister, but you will feel me. You will feel me—**now**."

A hand caressed her flesh.

But it was not a visible hand, not a human hand, though she could feel the stroking fingers and the pressing palm.

It was like fire and ice, like an avalanche of snow, a waterfall of fire. It moved slowly down over her breasts and her belly and down, and stroked and pulsed, and her breath came fast—faster, faster—

Oh, a glorious sensation! A divine sensation!

The moving hand stopped.

"No, Little Sister," the voice whispered, "not a **divine** sensation. That is not the right word to use, considering who is giving you the sensation. Glorious, yes. Not divine, if you please."

"But who are you?" Celia asked breathlessly.



In the dream, her sex had changed. She was a tomcat.

"A friend, Little Sister. A friend and a lover."

"But **who?**"

"Do you insist on my having a name?"

"I want to know what to call you."

The hand moved slowly on her belly again, hot and cold at the same time, incredible and exquisite.

"For the meantime, call me **Ami.**"

The hand moved a little faster.

"Why did you come to me, Ami? Why not some other girl? Why not—"

"Why not Susan Rennie, for instance?"

Her breath was coming faster. "Yes! Why not Susan?"

"Well, you see, in order for me to visit someone—to become close to someone, as I am coming closer and closer to you—it is necessary for that person to want me."

"But I didn't want you, Ami," Celia said, breathing in quick, short gasps. "I didn't even know you. I knew nothing about you."

"Oh yes you did, Little Sister. Deep, deep within you you wanted me and wished for me—wished for all the things I could make possible. People I have visited in the past have pretended that they had nothing to do with it, that everything was my fault, but the truth is that they desired me. It is true of you, too, isn't it, Little Sister? Don't you desire me? Desire me? **Desire me?**"

The hand moved in swift, pulsing bursts.

"**Don't you? Don't you? Don't you?**"

"Oh yes!" she gasped.

"Good! Then all the rest follows! You are mine, Little Sister, and I am yours. Tomorrow night, at this same time, I will reveal everything to you. Now sleep."

She knew a final burst of ecstasy, then nothing.



THE PHONE WAS RINGING.

She was in bed in her room.

It was ringing in her mother's room. But last night the phone had been out of order.

Last night—last night—

Had it all happened? Was it all true? Or a dream?

No, not a dream. It had all happened. Ami had come to her, the wonderful, mysterious Ami. And he was coming to visit her again tonight.

She hurried down the hall to her mother's room and picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Celia, honey!" her mother's warm voice exclaimed. "Are you all right, darling?"

Celia laughed. She felt like laughing. She felt good. She had never felt quite this way—quite this special **kind** of feeling good—in her whole life. "Of course I'm all right! Everything's fine! Why shouldn't it be?"

"I know it was foolish to be worried," Pat

Knight admitted, "but late last night, here in my hotel room, I had the feeling that something was wrong there. Nothing happened?"

"No," Celia lied. "Nothing at all. Watched TV and went to bed."

She felt good about lying. Last night was her secret. Tonight would be, too. No one else would ever know.

But wait a minute, she thought. I've got to tell her about Mrs. Drummerstone, because she's bound to find out, and then she'll ask me why I didn't tell her.

"So you see, Mom?" she continued. "Even without Mrs. Drummerstone I was perfectly all right."

"What do you mean, **without** Mrs. Drummerstone?" Pat Knight demanded.

"She wasn't here."

"Wasn't **there**? Where was she?"

"Well, she had a phone call about eight o'clock or so—"

Funny, she thought. Last night, around





eight, the phone was working. And it's working this morning. But later last night it didn't work. When Ami was here.

"—a call from her home—let me see, what was it now—something about the stream in back of the house flooding, so she left. She said she'd be back soon, but I guess it must have been a real emergency, because I can see no one slept in the bed in the guestroom."

"Why, I can't believe it!" her mother exclaimed. "That's not like Ruth Drummerstone at all! When she gives a promise, she keeps it! Something must be really wrong at her house—I'd better phone and find out. And I'll come back tonight instead of tomorrow night, as I'd planned."

"Oh, no, Mother!" Celia protested. "If you're worried on account of maybe something terrible happening to me if I'm here by myself—though you can see that nothing terrible happened last night—I'll spend tonight with Jennie and her folks."

Jennie Aldredge was her closest friend, or had been, until last night.

"Well, all right," Pat Knight agreed. "Phone me from Jennie's house around seven thirty, okay?"

"Okay," Celia said happily. "I've got to rush for school. Love and kisses."

"Goodbye, darling. Now I'm going to phone Ruth Drummerstone. I just can't believe— — Goodbye."

Celia hung up. She went to the bathroom and got into the shower. She ran her hands over her body in the sweet warm fall of water, and her hands felt good on her flesh, but not like Ami's hand. There was nothing like Ami's hand in the whole world.

She was just finishing dressing in her bedroom when she looked out the window and saw a police car pull up hard and fast in front of the house.

Police. Why have they come here?

The doorbell rang. Celia went downstairs and opened the door.

It was not just one of the town patrolmen, it was Captain Swain himself. His son Jimmy was in her class, the Senior class, at Adams High.

Captain Swain's face was somber. "Hello, Celia. I want to ask you a few questions, okay?"

"Why sure, Captain Swain," she replied. "Come on in. Anything the matter?"

He followed her into the front room. He sniffed. "Funny smell," he said. "Something burn here last night?"

"Why, no," Celia said. "Not that I know of."

He sat down. "There's been a terrible tragedy, Celia. Mrs. Drummerstone was found early this morning in the stream behind her house. She had been dead for—well, for some hours."

Celia put her hands over her face.

"Yes, I know, honey," Captain Swain said.



"Sorry I had to tell you, I know how close you and your mother were to Ruth Drummerstone but try to pull yourself together, because the sooner I know the answer to some questions the sooner we'll know what happened. Mrs. Drummerstone was supposed to spend the night with you, wasn't she, on account of your mother being in New York?"

Celia took a deep breath, pressed her hands close to her face, then lowered them. "Yes, Captain."

"Why didn't she?"

"She had a phone call."

"When?"

"Around eight. When she hung up she told me someone from her house had called to say the stream in back was flooding. She said she had to go over there but she'd come back soon."

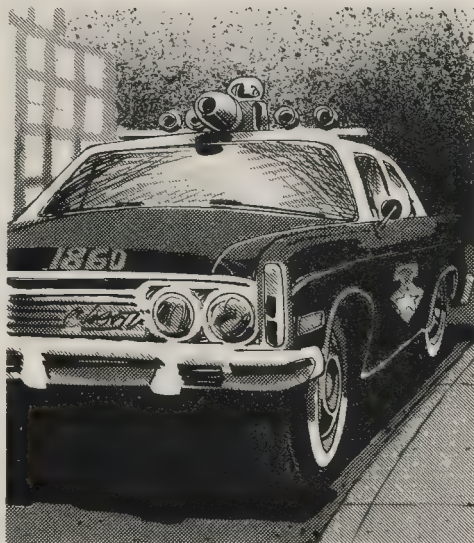
"Someone from her house phoned? You mean someone in Mrs. Drummerstone's house?"

"That's what she said," Celia replied.

"I've been there," Captain Swain said slowly. "No one phoned Mrs. Drummerstone last night from her house. The first they knew about this was when one of the boys went outside this morning—and found his mother floating dead, face-up, in the pool."

Celia gave a little cry.

"And the most terrible thing about it," Captain Swain continued, "was that—But no, I don't want to make you feel any worse than you do."





It was not just one of the town patrolmen, it was Captain Swain himself.

The phone rang. Her mother's voice again: "Celia—I've just learned. Mrs. Drummerstone—"

"I know, Mother."

"How do you know?"

"Captain Swain's here."

"I'm coming back today, Celia."

No, Celia thought. I can't let her. Otherwise Ami might not come tonight. "But Mother, why?"

"With a maniac running loose in town, you think I could stay here in New York?"

"A maniac?" Celia cried. "Why do you say that? Because Mrs. Drummerstone slipped and fell in the pool, there's a maniac running loose?"

"Didn't Captain Swain tell you about the expression on her face? **As if she'd seen something so horrible the sight alone was enough to kill her?**"

Celia gasped; and, strangely, at that moment she seemed to hear Ami's whispering,

oddly seductive voice: **You are mine, Little Sister, and I am yours.** She felt calm again. She knew exactly what to say.

"But Mother, that's ridiculous! Why, Mrs. Drummerstone was so strong and sensible and **healthy**, the sight of anything couldn't kill her! And just to be practical about it, where do you think I'd be safer tonight—staying with Jennie and her whole family, her father and mother and brothers, or just the two of us, you and me here, alone in our house?"

"Well," Pat Knight said uncertainly, "all I thought was—"

"And if you left today, you couldn't finish all your buying, could you? Listen, Mom, I'm okay! I'll be at school all today and with Jennie and her family all tonight! I'll phone you from there around seven this evening."

"Well, all right," her mother agreed, "but — You be careful!"

"I will. Bye-bye."

She hung up.



"Your mother told you?" Captain Swain asked. "I mean—the way Mrs. Drummerstone's face looked?"

Celia nodded.

"I never want to see anything like that again," he said, and shook his head. "Celia, you say someone phoned Mrs. Drummerstone last night, someone who must have sounded like one of her family, but wasn't. Did anything else happen that you know of? Anything a little out of the ordinary?"

"No, Captain."

"That smell—it seems to be gone now, but I noticed it when I came in. You sure there wasn't a fire?"

"How could there have been," Celia said with a serious, honest look, "without my knowing? All I know is what I've told you. Mrs. Drummerstone left in a big hurry, I did some homework, watched TV, then went to bed." She looked at her watch. "Gee, I'll be way late for school—"

"I'll give you a lift," Captain Swain said.

In almost any close friendship, one of the friends is just a little stronger, or more determined, than the other. With Celia Knight and Jennifer Aldredge, Celia was the one.

"I'm going to be staying with you tonight," Celia said during lunchtime in the cafeteria, "except I'm not, on account of Mrs. Drummerstone stumbled and fell in the pool in back of her house last night and drowned, and so my mother thinks there's a maniac running loose."

"Hey, hold it!" Jennie protested. "Mrs. Drummerstone's **dead?**"

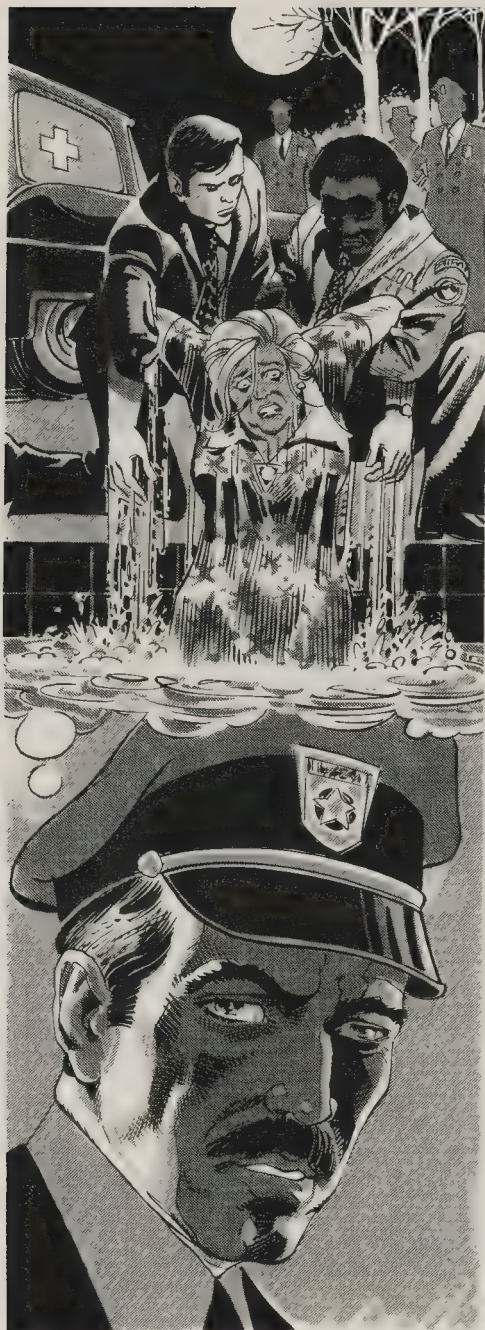
"Right."

"Why, that's horrible!"

"Right," Celia said calmly. "Horrible."

"How do you know all she did was stumble and fall in the pool?"

"Can you imagine anything but an accident killing Mrs. Drummerstone? So my mother thinks I'm staying with you, to be safe from



this imaginary maniac, but I can't, because I've got to be at our place tonight."

"Why?"

"I've got a date."

"Celia," Jennie whispered, "you mean you're having a love affair?"

"I guess that's what you'd call it," Celia said.

"Hey, listen, kid, you're not going to get pregnant, are you?"

Celia smiled. "No."

"Who is he?"

"No one you know. Now, I'm going to phone Mother in New York tonight around seven to tell her I'm at your house and everything's just fine. Maybe she'll phone back a little later. If she does, tell her I'm in the shower—she knows I take long, long showers. Then you phone me and I'll phone her from my place. Okay?"

"Okay," Jennie agreed, but her face was grave. "Gee, Celia, are you sure?"

"Sure of what?"

"That everything is—okay? That you're—well, I mean—I mean, you're sure you're doing the right thing?"

Celia asked herself: **Am I sure? Am I?**

Again she seemed to hear Ami's whispering voice:

You are mine, Little Sister, and I am yours.

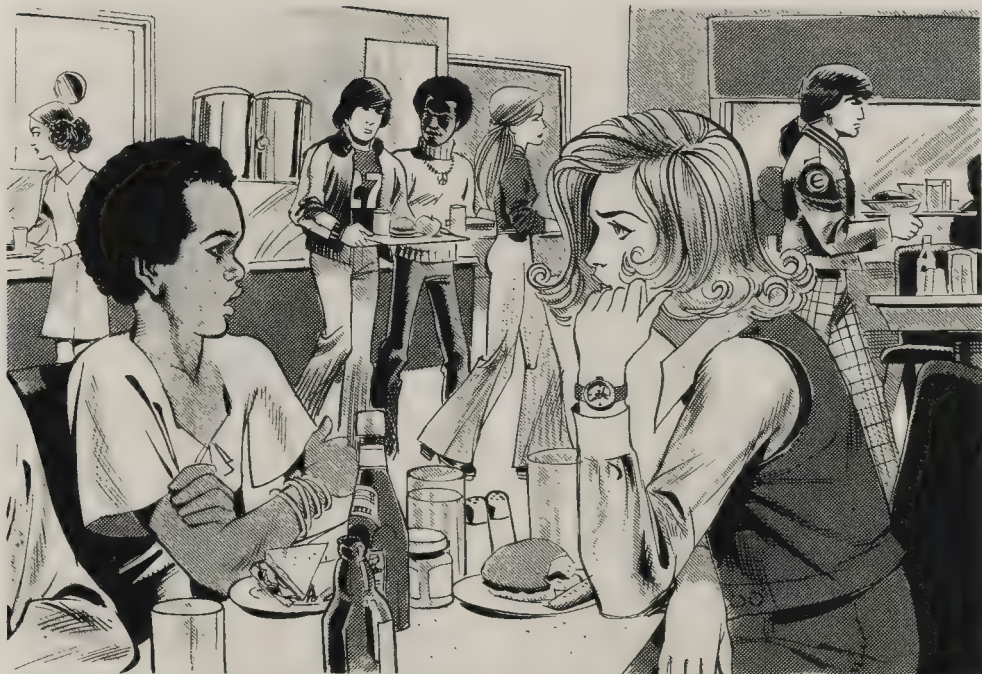
She smiled. "I'm sure. No troubles, no problems. Everything is working out roses. And I love you."

But she had never loved Jennie. Jennie was just a friend. Jennie could never be more than a friend. Not like another girl she knew—or would like to know. Would like to know real well.

Her heart beat faster at the thought.

The afternoon paper ran a headline:

**RUTH DRUMMERSTONE DEAD IN
TRAGIC ACCIDENT**



And all the details (her wonderful life, her great value to the community, her grieving family, etc.).

Nothing about the way her face had looked.

Just how **had** her face looked, Celia wondered. What could she have seen, there beside the pool in the moonlight, to fix her face in an expression that made a tough police captain say he never wanted to see anything like it again?

By now, of course, Mrs. Drummerstone's face would have been smoothed out and covered with cosmetics by the funeral parlor people, so it wouldn't look shocking to her grieving family and friends when they came to pay their last respects to her in her coffin.

But maybe the police had taken photographs of her, just as she had looked, floating face-up in the pool? To help them find the answer to what had happened, as Captain Swain had said?

But what had happened?

Mrs. Drummerstone **had** just slipped and drowned by accident, hadn't she?

Of course. Why would anyone want to kill Mrs. Drummerstone? Everyone loved and admired Mrs. Drummerstone.

Then why had her face looked so horrible?

There was the question again:

What had she seen?

Ami would know.

Why would Ami know?

Ami knew everything.

Ami knew every thought in her, Celia's, mind. He answered the questions in her mind as soon as she thought them.

He?

How did she know Ami was **he**? Why did she think of Ami as **him**? How could she know, when she had never seen Ami?

Who was Ami?

Why had the telephone worked, when the mysterious call came for Mrs. Drummerstone, and then **not** worked when Celia was

about to call the police?

Who had called Mrs. Drummerstone, if not a member of her family?

And why had Ami come to her, Celia? She remembered what she had said:

"But I didn't want you, Ami. I didn't even know you. I knew nothing about you."

And what Ami had said:

"Oh yes you did, Little Sister. Deep, deep within you you wanted me and wished for me — wished for all the things I could make possible . . ."

What were "all the things" Ami could make possible?

The ecstasy she had felt last night? **Even more, perhaps?**

Tonight she would learn. That was why nothing, nothing must be allowed to prevent her from meeting Ami tonight.

AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK Celia undressed and got into bed, exactly the time she had gone to bed the night before.

She had tested the telephone. It was working. (There was no reason for it not to work tonight. Last night there had been a good reason for it not to work. If the phone had been working last night, she would have called the police. It was Ami who had seen to it that the phone wasn't working, and that the extension phone in the guestroom had disappeared. Ami could do anything. Ami could make all kinds of things possible.)

So the phone was working, all right, but Jennie hadn't called. Which meant that Celia's mother hadn't phoned from New York.

Celia had called her at seven, told her she was at Jennie's, and that everything was fine. Pat Knight had seemed satisfied. "But don't you go out tonight, even with Jennie," she had warned Celia. "Both of you stay inside."

"We will, Mom," Celia had promised. "Now don't you worry any more—have yourself a little fun tonight, okay?"

Pat had laughed. "Okay, darling. Love you."





roving night bird sadly cried, then all was silence. Celia was asleep.

What was this?

Strange shapes formed in her sleeping mind. Such things as these had never been seen on earth.

A man's tortured face inside some kind of monster. A monster fish swam toward him, mouth gaping. A smaller monster, with a tiny caged monster for a head, sat on his back. On a thorny perch sat a grotesque, obscenely naked bird, long beak reaching toward an idiot boy's head.

Behind these horrors there were shapes even more grotesque, more obscene, shapes like howling furies! A piglike thing in robes, wearing glasses, reading, and over its shoulder a catlike face peered—and here was a monstrous woman holding a baby—why, why?—and a thing like a huge rat—and far up there, look, look!—a little fat evil thing riding on a



Celia lay in bed, waiting.

When would Ami come?

At exactly the time he had come last night, at one thirty. That was when she had started up, suddenly awake, and heard the **Da-dum da-dum** sound.

Would there be the same sound tonight? Or would Ami announce his presence in a different way?

Who cared?—just as long as he came.

She was deliciously excited. That was **precisely** how she felt. If only the time between now and one thirty would pass in a rush—if only Ami would come now, now.

But she must sleep. She had been asleep last night when he had come. Everything must be exactly the same.

And even as she thought **I must sleep** she felt herself drowsing off, a lovely soft warm feeling...

The night wind murmured in the trees, a



stick—oh, horrible, horrible!—go away, go away, **go away!**

And she was awake. Her body was wet. She was panting. The horrors still seemed to reach for her and leer at her.

Go away. You are only a nightmare. You don't exist.

Then, from downstairs, she heard the sound:

Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum-dum-dum.

It was one thirty-five. Ami was there. Ami was waiting for her.

Quickly she got out of bed, put on her robe, just as she had last night, and left the bedroom. She went downstairs, opened the door to the cellar.

Tonight there was not the burning, acrid smell of last night, it was a smell of—of what? Of huge scarlet blossoms blooming in the night under the swollen moon, of ferns and creeping flowers and ripe fruit split open—odors never known before.

"Greetings, Little Sister," Ami's voice whispered.

"Ami, Ami," Celia said, "I had a dream—a horrible dream—"

"What was in the dream?"

It was still vividly in her mind. "A monster fish, and a pig-like thing wearing glasses, and a huge rat, and other figures, half-human and half-beast, and a little fat thing riding on a stick—"

"A little manlike thing with a swollen belly, on a stick?"

"Yes," Celia whispered. "Ami, why should I have a dream like that just when you are about to come to me?"

Ami chuckled. "Well, Little Sister, it was a compliment, you see. The little fellow on the stick was Kowotai. Sometimes he has a swollen belly, sometimes three or four heads or one foot too many, but he is almost always on his stick."



"Who is Kowotai?"

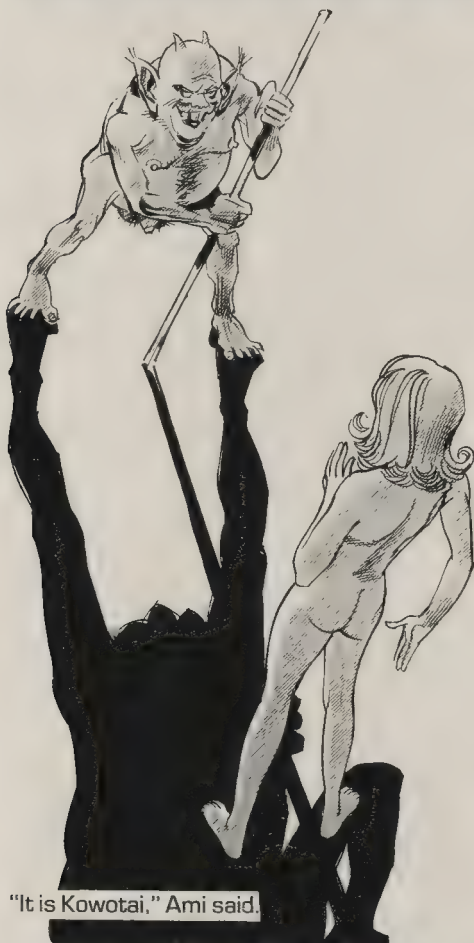
"An enemy, Little Sister. He sent that dream to you because he wants to make you afraid of me. And, you see, he almost succeeded in doing that, because you asked why you should have such a dream just before I come to you. Kowotai wants you to associate the ugly things in the dream with me, so that he can have you for himself."

She shuddered. "Oh no."

"There, there, Little Sister," Ami whispered, and she felt her robe opening and felt the stroking fingers again, just as she had felt them last night. "We will arrange things so that Kowotai no longer wants you—so that you are no longer beautiful and desirable in his eyes."

"What are you going to do, Ami? Are you going to make me ugly?"

Ami chuckled again. "Never, Little Sister! I am going to make you beautiful in another



way. And also I am going to make it possible for you to satisfy a craving so deep within you—and so shameful, you think—that you have never admitted it consciously to yourself. Only in a dream."

Have yourself a little fun tonight, okay?

Celia had said to Pat Knight, and Pat had thought, afterward, well, why not?—maybe I deserve it. Maybe it's time for me to forget once and for all that I ever had a no-good, lousy, dirty husband named Rod, whose mind was as evil as his face was handsome. Yes, evil. Clever as the devil in hiding it, but evil. It's just a miracle that Celia was never tainted—inherited none of that poison from him.

So Pat had gone out with a boyfriend. Anyway, someone who'd been trying for a long time to be her New York boyfriend and get into bed with her.

Tonight, to Bill Lester's amazement and surprised delight, Pat had said **yes**. And it had been fun. He was a wonderful lover. She had been going without a man's skillful loving for much too long.

"We must do this more often," she had said afterward.

"I'd like to do it the rest of my life," Bill had said. "How about getting married?"

"You really mean that?"

"With all my heart and all the rest of my body, certain parts especially. But I never thought I had a hope with you. Say you will, Pat."

"Well," Pat said, "all right. But not right away. I've got to break the news to Celia—build up to it carefully, so it won't come as a shock."

"Why, what is she," Bill had asked, "a kind of goody-goody girl who doesn't believe in sex for Mom?"

"No. But Celia has a very sensitive nature, and I'm afraid that any emotional shock might do it a lot of harm. She never had the benefit of an affectionate father to give her his love—



I'm just amazed and grateful that she's turned out so well. She has never given me a single thing to worry about."

"Never done anything wild?"

"Never."

At that moment, quite inexplicably, Pat had felt an impulse to phone Celia. She had looked at her watch. Long past midnight—one thirty-five. Well, that settled that. She couldn't call Celia now, because the phone's ringing would wake up Jennie's family.

But why the impulse? There it was again:

Call her. Call her. Now.

She reached toward the bedside phone.

"Anything wrong?" Bill asked.

"I'm going to phone Celia."

"Why?"

"I just feel I should. I don't know why."

"But my God, darling," he protested, "look at the time! Didn't you say she was staying with a friend's family? You wake 'em up at almost two in the morning and they'll all be sore as a skunk at you—and I wouldn't blame them. Come on, come back to bed. I want to get to know my future wife a little better."

She hesitated.

"Come on, sweet stuff," Bill urged.

Pat gave in. She did not call.

Mrs. Drummerstone's death had been described as a "tragic accident," but Captain Swain agreed with only one of the two words. Her death was tragic, all right, but to believe that it was an accident was just about the same as believing that any one of his ten-man police force—husky six-footers, all in fine physical shape—could stumble, fall into a small pool, and drown.

Bull.

Someone had killed Ruth Drummerstone.

But how? There were no marks on her head to show that she had been strangled or held under water until she drowned, and no gashes or even bumps on her head, to show that in falling she had hit a rock.





There was not a single wound on her body, which was in as good shape as a woman athlete's.

So does that mean you honestly believe Ruth Drummerstone saw something so horrible the sight killed her?

So horrible the sight killed her?

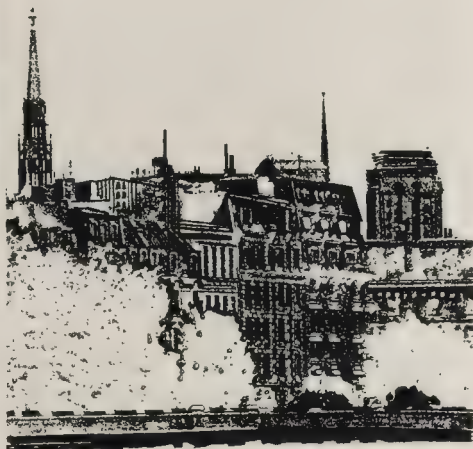
If there was one person in town you'd say couldn't be scared by anything, that person was—rather, that person had been—Ruth Drummerstone.

"I can't help it," Captain Swain said stubbornly, "I got to believe Ruth died of heart failure—shock—panic—crazy fear. Her face looked like—like——"

"Damned if I can describe the way her face looked," his lieutenant, Jack Rogers, observed. "Me, I've never seen anything like it, and I hope I never do again."

"Now I know what it looked like!" Captain Swain exclaimed: "I just remembered. When I was a kid, twelve or thirteen, I came across a book called **The Temptations of the Saints**, or something like that. It was illustrated with a bunch of old drawings. One of them showed St. Anthony—I'm pretty sure that's who it was—being tempted. Being tortured would be more like it! His face looked the way Ruth's looked. His mouth was so wide open he must have been screaming his lungs out, and his eyes were all bloodshot and starting out of their sockets. Because of what he was looking at."

"What was he looking at?" Jack Rogers





asked.

Captain Swain shook his head and smiled wryly. "To remember it now still throws a chill into me. St. Anthony was looking at the head of a devil. And that devil's head was—oh boy. It was all hell wrapped up in one piece. Scared me so much I had nightmares for a month. I burned that book, I remember. I thought something like that shouldn't be left on earth."

"So?" Jack said. "You figure we've got some nut dressed up like a devil running around at night?"

"Damned if I know, but we're going to find out, or bust a gut trying. Ruth was one of my favorite people." Captain Swain glanced at his watch. "Hey, I didn't realize it was so late. Got to be getting home."

He was an extremely conscientious man and always made a tour around town, including Hallbrook Heights, before turning in.

"I am going to make you beautiful in another way, Little Sister. I am going to make it possible for you to satisfy a craving so deep within you—and so shameful, you think—that you have never admitted it consciously to yourself. Only in a dream."

She was naked.

"Now you are beautiful as a woman, Little Sister," Ami's caressing voice continued. "Roses bloom on your breasts. Your hips curve like a soft couch. Your feet are like little white doves and your legs are slim as the legs of antelopes. How beautiful you are to me, Little Sister! I would possess you now—but first you must have your share of our bargain. And so you will change. Watch your beautiful body change, Little Sister."

She looked down at her body.

The rounded swell of her breasts began to diminish. Her soft, smooth arms became

hard. Her hips lost their seductive curve. Her belly, her thighs, became flat and lean. Muscles grew in her legs.

"You are no longer Little Sister," Ami whispered. "You are Little Brother. You are no longer Celia. You are—What shall we call you? Nick? Nick. Look at yourself, Nick. Are you not a young man? Is not your body a man's? Is not your nature a man's? Do you not desire all the things a young, healthy, virile man desires? And one above all?"



She was a man.

To feel the strength in her! To feel the sex in her! No, no, not **her!** To feel the strength, the sex, in **him!**

To feel the lewdness in his mind! To feel the delicious evil blooming in his mind, like huge scarlet flowers!

To know that he could do anything, with his strength, his passion, and his evil, cunning mind!

"All your evil cunning is written on your handsome face, Little Brother," Ami whispered. "Your face would be beautiful in hell. I told Little Sister she would be beautiful in a different way. And you are, are you not, Little Brother?"

"Yes, Ami!" Nick cried. "And am I always to be like this?"

"Only at night."

"Every night?"

"Only when you wish."

"For how long?"

"Until the first light of dawn. Then you become Celia again—my Little Sister. But now you are Nick. And now you can satisfy the secret desire that was buried so deep in Celia she could never admit it to herself. You can satisfy it now. **Now.**"

"Thank you, Ami!" Nick cried. "Thank you!"

"Oh, there will be plenty of time to thank me, Little Brother," Ami whispered.

Nick was running in the night. Celia lay far behind, almost forgotten—Celia, and Celia's clothes, everything that was Celia's—Celia's hang-ups, Celia's fears.

But not Celia's deep, secret desire, which was now Nick's. It was no longer secret. It was out in the open at last, the beautiful goal, the beautiful magnet, drawing him so swiftly through the night. Oh, how wonderful it was, to feel like this, so full of desire and passion, so full of the delicious wine of evil, feeling his manhood rise and pulse within him!

Here was the brook running down the hill from Hallbrook Heights, the brook that ran behind the dead woman's house, what was her name?—some stupid name like drum—Drummerstone. It was Ami who had got the Drummerstone woman out of Celia's house, Ami who had killed her. How, Nick didn't know, but he knew for certain that it was Ami, wonderful, beloved Ami, all-powerful Ami. And Nick leaped over the brook. His male strength gave his feet wings.

And now up, up the hill, bending and swerving through the dark trees, up Hallbrook Heights toward one certain house, a handsome white Colonial house, gleaming and immaculate, so choice, so precious, so virgin!—like the girl who lies sleeping in one certain room upstairs, the girl with hair like a golden banner—

Susan.

The black cat had crouched on the window-sill, ready to leap. But that had been only a dream.

Tonight was real.

Nick knew the windows of Susan's room. Celia had been in Susan's house. Celia had even been in Susan's bedroom, once, with two or three other girls. Celia had looked at Susan's bed, and thought—

But tonight was real. Tonight was not a secret desire, long hidden, never consciously admitted. Tonight it was Nick who would be in Susan's room. Like a cat he would climb the latticework on the wall below Susan's



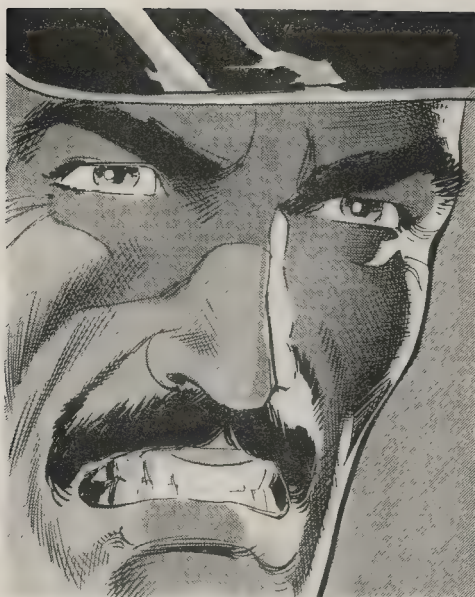
window, and slide the window open, and creep into the room, and for a moment or two, or three or four—oh, delicious moments!—stand looking at the beautiful girl, her breasts softly rising and falling in the gentle pattern of sleep...

Here was the house.

Crouching, Nick ran through the garden bushes and trees. He reached the side of the house. Looking up, he saw a splinter of light in the edge of Susan's window. Only a

Seemed like old Peter had always been around, had always had his long white beard and full head of white hair.





breath. "Old bones get tired soon. Was a time when I could roam the hills all night and feel fresher than when I started. Now I can't walk for more than three or four hours without feeling done in. I'm out so late because I wanted to see the dawn come up over the hills—but I guess I better go home, thanks to you, Captain."

Old Peter was in his seventies, perhaps even the eighties, who lived in a shack at the edge of town, with his chickens and his donkey and his vegetable patch. Peter the hermit, the kids called him. Captain Swain could remember calling him that, when **he** was a kid. Seemed like old Peter had always been around, had always had his long white beard and full head of white hair.



night-light. Susan was asleep. Soon enough she'd be awake, in Nick's arms, her lips covered by Nick's lips, her body covered by Nick's strong, urgent, seeking body—soon!

He climbed the latticework. The window yielded easily. No burglar alarm, no watchdogs barking. Phones did not work when Ami so desired, and burglar alarms did not work, and watchdogs stayed asleep. Such was Ami's power. Wonderful, beloved Ami!

Nick crept into the room. Just as he had known he would, he stood at Susan's bedside. The night-light showed the outline of her body, and her sweet lips, slightly open, and the rich breasts. The perfect face, so beautiful. All waiting for Nick.

The girl's eyes opened. She looked directly into Nick's eyes. Her mouth opened. But before she could utter a sound, Nick covered her mouth with his.

THE HEADLIGHTS of Captain Swain's car fell on a familiar figure. He slowed and stopped. "Hi, old timer," he called. "What're you doing out so late? Can I give you a lift?"

"Thank you, Captain," the old man replied. "Why yes, I'd be grateful." He got into the car and leaned back with a wheeze of released





"What's happening to this town, anyway?" she said to Celia.



"How old are you, anyway, Pete?" Captain Swain asked. "Near eighty?"

"Near ninety," the old man answered. "Captain, you're the authority on these things—what do you make of Ruth Drummerstone's death?"

"You'd probably think I was crazy if I told you, Pete."

"No sir, I wouldn't. I think you're about the least-crazy person anyone could hope to find—outside of poor Ruth. How does someone as sane and sensible and **careful** as Ruth come to die in a damn fool accident like that?"

Captain Swain sighed. "Wasn't an accident."

"Murder?"

"Kind of."

"And what would a 'kind-of' murder be, Captain?" old Peter inquired.

"A murder caused by fright. Someone frightened Ruth so much her heart stopped

and she fell into the pool," Captain Swain said. "So now do you think I'm nuts, Pete?"

The old man's gray eyes narrowed in his wrinkled face. "Nope. But it would be pretty hard to frighten someone like Ruth to death. What did it, do you reckon?"

"Wish I knew."

They turned into the road running around the bottom of Hallbrook Heights, which eventually led to the farmland outside town and old Peter's shack.

The headlights picked up another figure.

This was a young figure, dressed in the kind of outlandish clothes kids wore these days, the kind of clothes Captain Swain's son, Jimmy, wore.

The young figure was running.

"And what's he running away from, this late?" Captain Swain muttered.

"Just feeling good," old Peter remarked.

"I used to run like that, when I was young, and feeling good—which was all the time."

"We'll ask him, all the same."

Captain Swain switched on the car's siren for a second. The running figure stopped. The head turned.

The face stared at them in the full glare of the headlights.

"**God damn,**" Captain Swain breathed.

Then the figure was gone. It plunged into the roadside bushes. Captain Swain stopped the car with a jerk. He jumped out. "Hey, you!" he yelled. "Come back here!" He drew his gun, started in pursuit, but he could see nothing. The figure had vanished as though by magic, and he realized it was hopeless.

He returned to the car. "Did you see what I saw, Pete?" he asked.

"I did," replied the old man gravely. "And I'd have to say it looked like a maniac's face, lit up by what I'd have to call—" He stopped, took a deep breath.

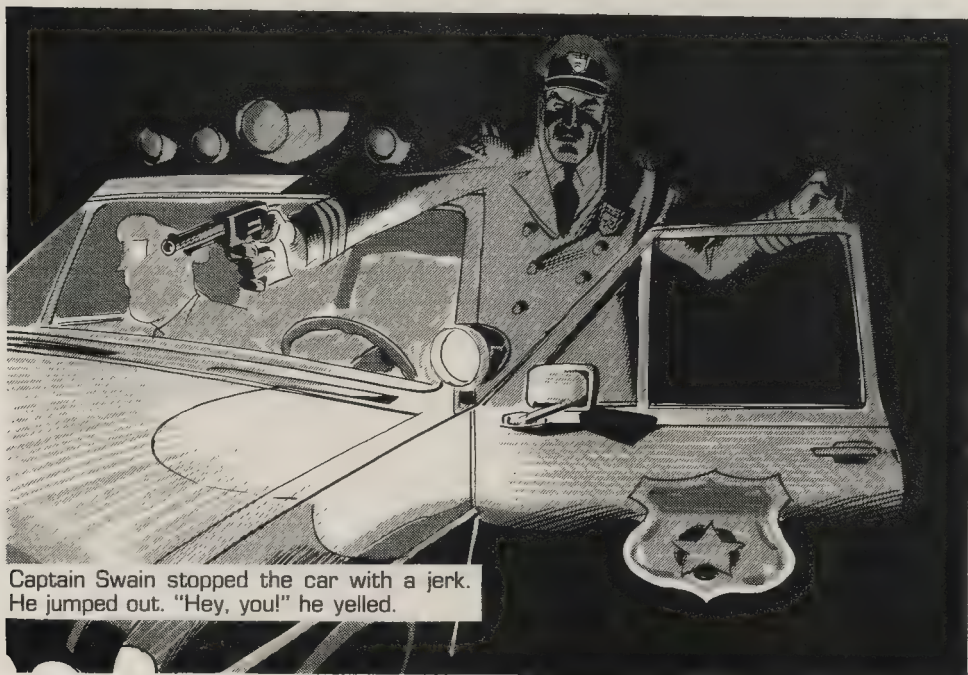
"Lit up by what you'd have to call what?"

"By what I'd have to call—unholy glee."

"That's what I'd call it too," Captain Swain grimly agreed. "And I think it must have had something to do with Ruth's death. I don't say that face alone killed her—it didn't kill **us**. But it had something to do with her death. And I'm going to find that fellow. I should say **we're** going to find him. You can help me and the police department, Pete. The kids come and see you and ride your donkey, just as I used to ride the donkey you had when I was a kid. Find out what they know, if any of them have seen a stranger in town, with a face that makes you think of nothing but evil."

Nick stripped off his clothes, lay on the bed, ran his hands over his smooth, hard young body, and smiled in sheer contentment. What perfect pleasure it was, to remember the last few hours! Susan's eyes opening, Susan staring at his face—then her mouth opening.

But he had closed her mouth before she



Captain Swain stopped the car with a jerk. He jumped out. "Hey, you!" he yelled.



could scream.

Susan, Susan—how you used to look down on me. No, not on me, Nick—look down on Celia. How you brushed off Celia with a cool little contemptuous smile when Celia tried to make friends. So proud and superior, weren't you, Susan?—so beautiful, living in your beautiful house. How you would have laughed, if Celia had ever told you that she loved you!

Are you laughing now, Susan?

Are those proud, rich parents of yours laughing?

To think of it!—that someone actually had the **nerve** to break into Susan Rennie's bedroom!

Why didn't the burglar alarm work? Why didn't the dogs bark? Above all, why didn't you scream, Susan? That's what your parents are asking you right now, aren't they, Susan my love? Are you telling them you couldn't scream because **he** sealed your mouth with

'his—and because, when he left, you were beyond screaming?

Who was he, they are asking you. Have you ever seen him before?

The correct answer to that is no. Because no one has ever seen Nick before.

How they'll be hunting for Nick tomorrow! The whole police force, with Captain Swain leading the hunt! Why, the Rennies would practically turn out the National Guard, to find Nick! But they would have no more luck than Captain Swain had had tonight, when he had tried to catch Nick. Even less luck. Captain Swain had seen Nick. But tomorrow, and all the following days, not one of the hunters would see Nick, because in the daytime Nick did not exist.

A faint light outside the window. Sunrise.

Nick looked down at his naked body. Good-by, Nick, for a little while.

His breasts began to swell.

His breasts became her breasts.

It was Celia who lay in the bed.

Susan Rennie was not at school the next day. The reason was not announced. The reason never would be announced publicly. Could anyone imagine the proud Rennies telling the world that an intruder had broken into their beautiful daughter Susan's bedroom in the middle of the night?

But they told the police, of course, and somehow the word spread. Ran like wildfire through town.

Can you imagine? Of all people, to have a terrible thing like that happen to—the Rennies, of all people! Why, you'd think with their guard dogs and private patrol service and burglar alarms and everything, it would be impossible for anyone to break in!

Unless they're not telling the whole truth?

Unless Susan **let** him come in, whoever he was?

No, that's impossible. Not Susan. She's too



proud. Too stuck-up. The truth is, there's a maniac loose . . . A sex maniac.

Pat Knight heard the news, when she returned in the late afternoon.

"What's happening to this town, anyway?" she said to Celia. "First poor Ruth dying in that horrible way and now this! How terrible for Susan and her father and mother! I wonder if they'll ever get over it? I wouldn't be surprised if they moved away . . . Celia, are you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right, Mother!" Celia said.

"You seem a little different, somehow—a look in your eyes I can't remember ever seeing before. But I suppose I'm imagining it," Pat admitted. "I suppose it will be easy for everyone to imagine all kinds of things, from now on."

"You know something, Mother?" Celia said



cheerfully. "**You** look a little different to me."

"I do?"

"You certainly do. What happened in New York?"

Pat smiled. "Well—"

"Did you have a little fun, the way I told you to?"

"I shouldn't be feeling like this, after Ruth's death, but I can't help it," Pat confessed. "Celia, how would you feel if I told you I've met someone I like? Someone I like very much?"

"A man, Mother?"

"Of course! What do you think?"

"Do you love him?"

Pat nodded.

"Are you going to get married?"

"He's asked me. And there's a law that lets you marry again, if your husband disappears and hasn't been heard of for a number of years. But— Well, it all depends on you, honey. Would it come as a shock, because of your father?"

"Father never meant anything to me," Celia said. "What kind of man was he, Mother?"

"He was not a good man," Pat Knight said,





remembering the handsome, evil face that had left a shadow in her eyes—the shadow her new love would get rid of. “Thank heaven you didn’t take after him in anything. You are my own darling, wonderful girl, and I’m proud of you.”

Old Peter asked the kids who came to ride his patient, long-suffering donkey: “Any of you seen a stranger in town, fellow about 17, good-looking face but sort of mean or evil, you might say?”

“No, Pete.”

“Not me, Pete.”

“Keep your eyes open, will you?”

“Okay, Pete.”

“The only description Susan Rennie can give,” Captain Swain said, “is of someone about 17, a handsome face but an evil face. Like a maniac, she said. That’s exactly what Pete and I thought, when we saw this fellow’s face last night in the headlights. Handsome—evil—maniacal. So it must have been the same one. He must have just come from breaking into Susan’s bedroom. And I’ve got a hunch that’s practically a conviction that when we catch him—and we’re going to catch him—we’ll also solve the mystery of Ruth Drummerstone’s death.”

He smashed his fist into his desk.

“I say again, we’re going to catch him. He’s still in town, I’ll bet anything on it. A maniac like that can’t stop. He lies low in the daytime, comes out at night. That’s when we’ll get him, at night. We’ve got so many men looking for him we can’t fail.”

Half-past ten.

“I’m tired,” Pat Knight said. “Think I’ll go to bed. I don’t know if the two of us should stay here by ourselves, with all these horrible things happening, but—”

“Don’t worry, Mother,” Celia said. “We’ll be okay.”



"I've double-locked all the doors—and keep your windows locked, Celia, understand?"

"Okay," Celia said, smiling.

Naked, she lay in bed.

Her windows weren't locked but her door was.

What was it Ami had said?

"You may be Nick only at night, Little Sister. Whenever you wish, but only at night. Until the first light of dawn."

Did she wish to be Nick again tonight?

She did. The hunger was in her.

For Susan?

For Susan, yes, but it would be foolish for Nick—even for Nick, with all his strength and cunning!—to enter Susan's house again tonight. The proud, rich Rennies would have stationed guards all around their beautiful house tonight, hidden guards, waiting to trap him, in case he should try to strike again.

Nick must visit someone else tonight.



Who?

Nick would decide.

"Ami, Ami," Celia murmured, "I wish to be Nick. Let me be Nick, Ami."

Almost at once the change began. It seemed to happen much faster than before.

Nick looked at his naked body and grinned. He got off the bed, took out Nick's clothes from their secret hiding place, and put them on. He inspected himself in the full-length mirror. Oh, he looked good! Handsome Nick! Clever Nick! Evil Nick!

Where are you going tonight, Nick?

He knew.

Oh, what a clever idea! And what a funny idea! Worthy of Nick's clever, subtle, evil mind! Who else would think of such an idea but Nick?

If there is always one perfect girl who stands out, who seems to have everything (Susan Rennie, who is no longer quite so perfect as she used to be), why, there is always another girl, at the other end of the scale.

That other girl was Janie Smith.

Susan would never let anyone touch her. Janie was exactly the opposite.



Janie liked boys, and boys liked Janie. Janie's reputation was what you would call not so great, unless you were a boy looking for someone like Janie. Then you would have to say Janie's reputation was **great**.

Nick grinned again, as another thought struck him.

Every girl in town would have her windows locked tonight, because of the "maniac."

Every girl but one.

Janie.

Okay, Janie, Nick thought, **you're going to have a visitor tonight. And the funny thing about it is this—if you tell people tomorrow, they'll think you're just making it up, because of the kind of girl you're supposed to be.**

Nick slid out of the window, lowered it behind him, held on to the windowsill for a moment, let go, and dropped to the ground. He landed lightly as a cat. Celia had had a dream about a cat once, and Nick was like a cat, as sure and swift on his feet, free to roam where he wished, like a cat in the night!

A lot of people were looking for Nick tonight, but Nick was cleverer than any of them. Nobody was ever going to catch Nick.

Again he was running through the night, feeling the blood hot in his veins, feeling the same wonderful hungry desire—how great it was to be Nick!

Here was Janie's house, in the poorer section of town.

No one was guarding **her** house. Captain Swain would have laughed at the idea.

Like a cat, Nick crawled up to the roof, clambered to Janie's window.

He tested the window. Open. Naturally. He crawled in.

His catlike eyes quickly adjusted to the dim light. He could see Janie's head on the pillow and the outline of her body under the bedclothes.

Janie was asleep. Dreaming of—what? One of her many love affairs, maybe.

After tonight you'll have something new to dream of, Janie!

Nick crawled to the bed on hands and knees. He put his mouth on Janie's mouth.

Then quickly withdrew it.

Janie's mouth was cold.

Nick looked at her face. Her eyes were wide open, staring. But not at Nick. Staring at something she had seen, something so horrible it had left her face frozen in an expression of mad terror, and left her heart still.

Janie Smith was dead.

"THAT SETTLES IT," Captain Swain declared at his news conference the next day. "The man who killed Ruth Drummerstone and attacked Susan Rennie and killed Jane Smith is one and the same person, the young man old Pete and I saw the other night."

"Are you saying the sight of him is so terrible it kills people, Captain?" a reporter asked. "Then how is it you're standing there? If you and old Pete saw him, how come you're both still alive and kicking?"

"I can't answer that," Captain Swain said, "but I know he's the one. And I know we're going to get him."

"Seems to be a pretty slippery kind of guy," another reporter said. "Practically invisible. Maybe that's who he is—the invisible man. Otherwise how could he get to Janie's house last night and out again and back to wherever he hides without anyone seeing him? And how many people were looking for him last night? Counting the police and special

deputies and private citizens—a couple of hundred at least."

"We'll have three hundred out tonight. And I invite every member of the press to join in," Captain Swain said grimly.

Old Pete was working in his vegetable garden when a kid named Eddie, red-haired kid with a big grin, came up.

"Hey, Pete, you know that guy you told us to keep an eye open for? Well, I think I saw him."

"When did you see him?"

"Late last night—real late. I got out of bed to go and get a glass of milk, because I was thirsty—felt kind of hungry, too, so I thought I'd have a peanut-butter sandwich along with the milk—"

"Please, Eddie, just tell me what you saw," old Pete said.

"That's what I'm doing, Pete! So I was standing there in the kitchen looking out while drinking my milk and eating my peanut-butter sand-

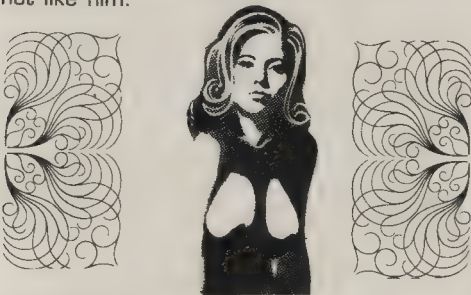


wich, and—well, you know where we live, at the bottom of Oak Drive, with a bunch of trees and stuff at the back of the house—well, I saw this guy come running through the trees— —”

“How could you see him if he was running through the trees?”

“I mean he came out of one bunch of trees and crossed an empty space before running into some more trees—**that’s** when I saw him. He turned his head, I guess to look around to see if anyone was following him—he was running real fast, like he was trying to get away from someone—and I saw his face, and— —”

Eddie gulped and looked serious, which was not like him.



“Boy, some face. Like you said, Pete, **mean**-looking.”

“And evil,” Pete added gravely.

“What’s evil mean exactly, Pete?”

“Wicked,” Pete said. “Worse than wicked. The devil used to be called the Evil One.”

“Hey, you know something?” Eddie cried. “This guy’s face did look kind of like a devil’s face, grinning like he was! I mean **real** mean! Can I ride the donkey, Pete?”

“You bet you can!” old Pete declared. “I’ve got to go downtown and see Captain Swain.”

Bill Lester phoned Pat from New York. His voice was very serious.

“Darling, I don’t like this story in the paper about what’s been going on in your town one little bit. I don’t like the idea of your being there by yourself one little bit.”

“I’m not by myself, Bill,” Pat replied. “Celia’s



here with me.”

“I don’t like the idea of both of you being there in your house by yourselves. Why don’t you both come down here to stay until the police have got this horrible business cleared up?”

“I can’t leave my shop,” Pat objected, “and Celia can’t leave school.”

“All right,” Bill said decisively. “So I’m going to come up there. I want to meet Celia anyway—I want her to get to know me. You’ve

got a spare bedroom, haven't you?"

"Yes, that's no problem. The problem is—"

"The problem is my behaving myself? Don't worry."

"The problem's Celia. She's very—well, **proper**, you know, and she may not like the idea, no matter how well-behaved you are. Let me ask her." Pat put down the receiver. "Celia?"

Celia was in the next room. "Yes, Mother?"

"The friend I was telling you about, would you mind if he stayed with us for a few days?"

Celia thought: **Would that be good or bad? But if I say no, she'll wonder why—might get suspicious. Anyway, nothing can happen to Nick. Nick's smarter and stronger than anyone.** "No, I don't mind," she replied.

"All right, Bill," Pat said. "Celia's anxious to meet you."

"Trouble is, I can't get there until tomorrow. So for tonight, I want you both to stay with friends. That's an order, darling! Please, please obey it! Or I'm going to be very sore—and worried!"

Pat laughed. "Very well. I'll stay with the Drakes, and Celia—honey," she called, "you wouldn't mind staying with Jennie and her folks for one more night, would you?"

"Why?"

"Bill says he'll be very worried otherwise."

"Okay," Celia said. **So Nick will have a night off tonight, she thought. Probably better that way, since the whole town's looking for him. Clever, evil Nick!**

"How is your love affair, Celia?" Jennie whispered.

"Great," Celia whispered. "Just wonderful."

They were in bed in Jennie's room. Only one dim night-light was burning.

"Won't you tell me who he is?"

"I can't, because—oh, you just wouldn't believe it."

"Gee, what a mystery!" Jennie whispered.

By and by Celia dozed off, thinking of Ami,





and Nick—Nick, who would return tomorrow night...

Then she was awake.

How much later?

What was happening?

She was changing—but without wishing to!

She could feel Nick's hard, masculine body taking over from Celia's soft feminine body, could feel his evil mind taking over too.

She willed the change to stop. **No, no no! Stop!**

But she was no longer Celia. She was Nick.

Nick was filled with desire. Out into the night, Nick, to find your love for tonight!

But your love lies right here in bed next to you, Nick!

No, Nick, no! Leave her alone! She's only a friend.

To Celia she is only a friend. To Nick she is—a figure to be desired. To be possessed. Nick wants her.

Nick moved closer to the sleeping girl. He could feel the warmth of her body. His hands crept over her body. He felt her move in response. **She wants you, Nick! How wonderful that you changed tonight, Nick! Otherwise you would never have discovered that Jennie wants you!**

Now Jennie was awake. She gasped, "Celia? Celia? But you're not Celia!"

Nick closed her mouth with his. **Stop struggling, Jennie, my love. You want me. You want Nick. Every girl wants Nick!**

Fiercely Jennie pulled loose from his grasp. She screamed.

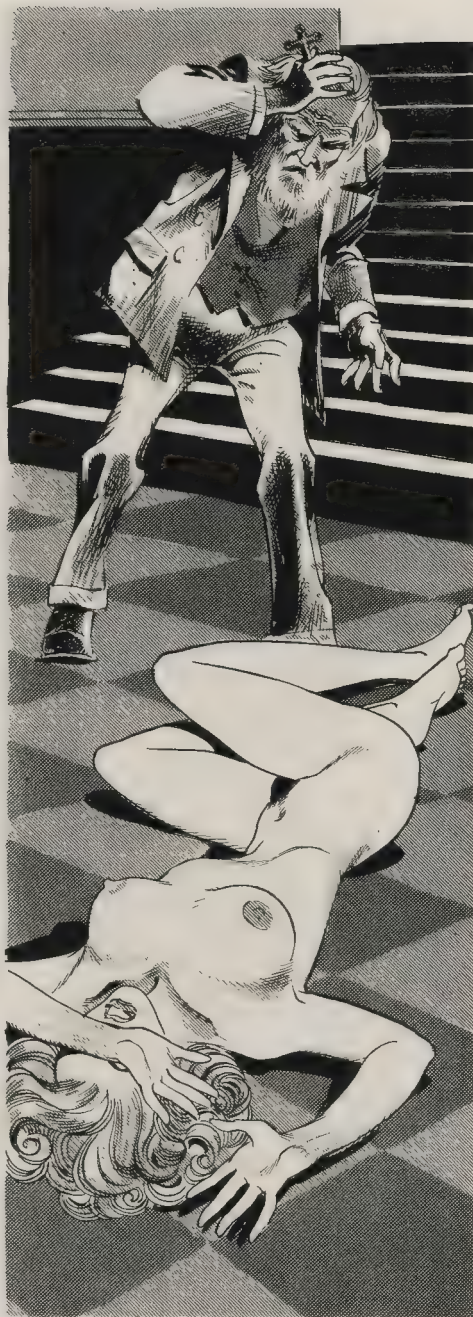
Someone in the next room shouted. Jennie's father. And now her mother, screaming.

Run, Nick, run! Hurry, Nick! Get away, Nick, into the night!

Nick leaped out of bed, plunged for the window, pulled it open, dropped to the ground.

Naked, he ran through the night.

They're chasing you, Nick! Shouting



men! Police cars, sirens screaming!

But they can never catch Nick. Nick is faster and cleverer than any of them, isn't he?

Nick ran down a back alley, leaped over a fence, across a yard, over another fence.

The lights, the shouting men pursued him.

"There he goes! Around there! He's naked.

NAKED. Stop, God damn you!"

The sound of shots.

Hide, Nick! You are strong and clever,



Nick, but there are so many of them, and they're coming closer, Nick, closer—

But here at last was Oak Drive, and the friendly shielding trees. Nick ran through the trees. He could hear the police cars roaring up Oak Drive. He must hide. Where?

In Celia's house. In Celia's house there was safety for Nick. He could get in through the back door, where they always kept a hidden key.

Breathing hard—even Nick, strong, won-

derful Nick, could not run forever—he came to the backyard of Celia's house. He fumbled for the key, found it, unlocked the door, went in, locked the door behind him. He ran up the stairs to Celia's room. He closed the door, locked it.

He saw the police cars' lights scything through the night, heard excited men shouting.

Another man ran around from behind the house.

"I swear I saw him go in here!"

"The Knights' house?"

"Right!"

"My God, Celia's in there! He's after Celia!"

And Nick saw another light.

Just the hint of light in the eastern sky.

Soon, very soon, it would be dawn.

They forced the front door. With guns ready, they stormed into the house.

"He must be in her room!" Captain Swain shouted. "Maybe already he's—"

They pounded up the stairs.

"Celia? Celia?"

They opened a door, another door. Empty rooms.

"This must be her door." Captain Swain tried it. "Locked. Celia? **Celia!**"

A voice answered:

"Yes? What is it?"

And Celia opened the door.

She was wearing a robe. Her hair was tousled, and she looked surprised. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Did you see him, Celia?"

"See who?"

"The maniac! The killer!"

"Why no," Celia said, frowning. "I haven't seen anyone. I woke up when I heard all that noise downstairs, and I got out of bed and turned on the light, and—But what's happened? Is it something terrible, Captain Swain?"

"He must have gone into another house," Captain Swain said. "Celia, you shouldn't be here alone."

"All right," she agreed. "I'll get dressed and leave. But you're going to catch him now, aren't you, if he's somewhere in the neighbor-



hood?"

"We're going to catch him," he said grimly, "dead or alive."

They left.

Dawn had come just in time.

But what would she tell Jennie, and Jennie's parents, and her mother?

Ami would think of something. She must ask Ami.

At that moment she heard, from below, a sound that made her heart beat faster:



Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum, da-dum, da-dum-dum-dum . . .

Celia opened the basement door. The same smell—the smell that had first told her of Ami's presence—was in the air, the burning smell that had made her think the house was on fire.

Ami was here.

"Yes, I am here, Little Sister," his voice said. Before, he had always whispered, but now his voice was strong and harsh.

"Ami, Ami, why did I turn into Nick, without wishing to?"

"Let me look at you, Little Sister."

She took off her robe.

"It is Kowotai," Ami said. "There is his mark. Look at your breasts."

There was a small red puncture mark, as if left by a needle, or the fang of a beast, on each breast.

"Kowotai turned you into Nick, to make trouble. It was Kowotai who killed the girl Jane Smith, to make trouble. Kowotai is still in you. We must banish the little devil Kowotai. Kowotai, Kowotai, come forth, little devil!"

A squealing sound was in the air. A little pig could have made it. But this was not a little pig—this horrible shape, dancing and kicking in front of Celia's eyes—the little swollen manlike shape she had seen in the terrible dream, riding on a stick!

How he squealed and shrieked!

"You have no power over me, Ami!" he screamed. "You cannot make me go!"

"No?" said Ami's angry voice.

A shape more horrible than any nightmare shape formed in the hot-burning air. A shape out of the very mouth of hell—the terrible eyes, the snout, the bestial face, the grinning mouth, the hairy hide, the tusks, the horns!

This was Ami.

Celia screamed

Old Peter was slowly trudging through the woods behind Oak Drive when he heard the scream.

It came again. He followed the sound to a house on Oak Drive.

The front door was ajar. He went in. A burning smell was in the air. The basement door was open. Old Peter hurried to it and looked down.

A naked girl lay writhing on the basement floor. She screamed and screamed. The eyes were starting from her head. The screaming mouth was like an open wound. She saw some horror invisible to old Peter's eyes, but he knew what it was.

He took out the silver crucifix suspended

from his neck. Holding the crucifix high, he walked down the basement steps.

"Foul fiend," he cried, "I banish you!"

He knelt beside the screaming girl. He waved the crucifix over her mouth. He held the crucifix high.

"I banish you!"

The screaming stopped. The burning smell was gone. The girl lay still.

But perhaps the shock of what she had seen had killed her. Old Peter knelt and put his ear to her chest.

Very faintly he heard the slow-beating heart.

He put the girl's robe over her naked body.

The devil only visits those with some evil in their heart.

Would the devil return? Would the devil-driven youth run through the midnight streets again?

Was it possible that this girl and that evil youth were one and the same?

Who could believe such a thing?



"I believe," Old Peter murmured. He bowed his head and raised the silver crucifix to his lips.

The End



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